CLAIMS

1. A system for facilitating transactions between customers and businesses comprising:

first means for initiating a transaction between a customer and a business entity, said transaction associated with a product or service;

5   second means for automatically selecting a means for delivering said product or service to said customer from a plurality of means for delivering in accordance with predetermined selection criteria, said plurality of means for delivering independent from said business entity, and providing a signal in response thereto; and

third means for automatically providing said product or service to said customer

10   via said means for delivering in response to said signal, said third means including a map generator that automatically generates a map based on the locations of said means for delivering, said business entity, and said customer.

2. A system for facilitating transactions between customers and businesses comprising:

first means for initiating a transaction between a customer and a business entity, said transaction associated with a product or service;

5   second means for selecting an independent delivery agent for delivering said product or service to said customer based on predetermined selection criteria including results of a weighting formula, said weighting formula including means for enabling said customer to specify priorities associated with each of said selection criteria and providing a signal in response thereto; and

10   third means for providing said product or service to said customer via said delivery agent in response to said signal.

3. The system of Claim 2 wherein first means includes means for enabling a user to selectively activate a bidding system to enable plural delivery agents to compete based on said criteria and in accordance with said specified priorities.

4. The system of Claim 3 wherein said first means further includes means for selecting a set of business outlets associated with said business entity, said business outlets having said ordered products and/or services available, said business outlets located in a predetermined region about said shipping destination.

5. The system of Claim 4 wherein said first means further includes means for selecting a set of delivery agents having coverage areas that include one or more business outlets of said set of business outlets and having hours of operation that include said time at which said order was placed.

6. A method for providing online tracking of delivery status information of a plurality of orders over a computer network comprising the steps of:

communicating delivery status information regarding at least one order from at least one non-web-tracking carrier shipping said at least one order to a server associated with a supplier from whom said at least one order originated;

storing said delivery status information on said server;

receiving, at said server, a request from a customer to view delivery status information for a selected order;

determining whether a carrier shipping said selected order is a web-tracking carrier or a non-web-tracking carrier;

retrieving said stored delivery status information from said server if it is determined that said carrier shipping said selected order is a non-web-tracking carrier;

formulating an internal request for delivery status information;

transmitting said internal request to said carrier;

15   receiving delivery status information from said carrier for said selected order; and displaying said delivery status information to said customer.

7. A method for employing a geographical information system comprising the steps of:

receiving input address information;

geocoding the input address information; and

5   outputting positional information in response to the geocoding step.

8. A method of determining service availability using a geographic information system, said method comprising the steps of:

providing address information and a selection criterion;

retrieving requested information based upon the address information and the

5 selection criterion;

geocoding said address information; and

outputting positional information.